



Bridger Bugler

F O R T B R I D G E R S T A T E H I S T O R I C S I T E

Superintendent's Desk



Fort Bridger State
Historic Site
Superintendent
Linley Mayer

The leaves are starting to change colors reminding us that summer has flown by and we are once again entering the fort's off-season. We had a sneak preview of winter at the beginning of September, but thankfully it has warmed up again and we are getting to experience fall.

Even with all of the changes 2020 has offered the world we still had a good summer and were able to have many events and programs take place. We were happy that we could provide a fun socially distanced Fourth of July for all ages through our drive-thru scenes and scavenger hunt. It was a very different Labor Day weekend and one that we hope we will never have to repeat, but we ended September on a high note through interpretive programs by the Hells Hole Mountain Men, Girl Scouts Love State Parks (see page 6), a Bike Your Park program (which is the one day a year that bikes are allowed to be ridden on site), and many volunteers helped us replace one of the Bridger-Vasquez Trading Post roofs for National Public Lands Day. Check out the Calendars section on page 7 to see what activities we have planned through December.

Next year, we hope to provide more one day interpretive programs like the Hells Hole Mountain Men did this year. Contact the fort if you would like to volunteer your historic skills so that you can show us your expertise.

As we head into winter don't forget that we have snowshoes for rent in the museum. It is a great way to get outside, see the fort, and soak in the sunshine.

Dispatch from the District

Greetings!

After about three months as the new manager of the Shoshone District, I would like to commend all of you at Fort Bridger for your service to the mission of our agency. You all do an excellent job of providing a consistent level of customer service, education, and interpretation of the fort's vast and unique cultural and historic resources. Make no mistake that what you all do each day is important on a larger scale than just the confines of the fort's physical boundaries. Your service continues to enrich lives and build communities not just within your jurisdiction, but across county and state lines. You are all great stewards of the site and the agency and I am enjoying working with you all and look forward to what we can accomplish together in the future.

Thank you and keep up the great work!

Kyle Bernis, Shoshone District Manager

A POINT IN TIME

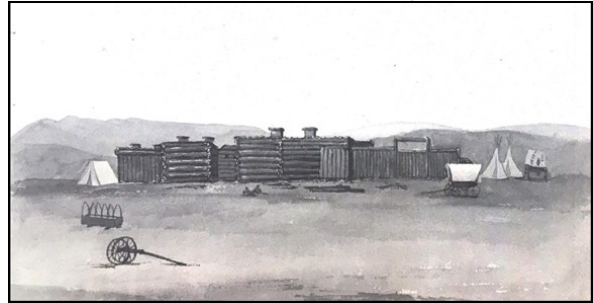
BY: MARTIN LAMMERS

In 1849 an English artist arrived at Fort Bridger; his name was James F. Wilkins. Wilkins had known moderate success at home and thought that traveling and recording the western emigrant trails might help garner greater interest in his work. In the short description of Fort Bridger Wilkins says simply:

Wednesday 25th

Camped near fort Bridger this evening. this is merely a few log houses built in a square and is a trading post belonging to the American fur company. A few

goods are kept for sale here at most exorbitant prices 25 cents for a small box of matches and 25 for a drink of whiskey. there are here 20 or 30 families of mountaineers principally canadian French married to Indian women, and living in tents of skins.... Considerable white frost was on the ground this mornng and this the 25th of July. Altho' there is plenty of grass and fine water, a beautiful looking trout stream close by, they say they cannot raise any vegetables on account of the coldness of the nights.



Fort Bridger sketched by James Wilkins, July 25, 1849

Wilkins goes on to mention the desertion at Fort Bridger of four soldiers from a group of 'mounted riflemen' camped nearby. Other members of the military group, along with several 'mountaineers' were sent in pursuit of the deserters, and ultimately returned with three of the four run-aways.

It should be mentioned that Fort Bridger was owned by 'Bridger and Vasquez', and not the American Fur Company.

James Wilkins returned to England and formed a traveling show exhibiting his work in a diorama form. This exhibition received only moderate success. Little is known of James Wilkins after that.

Also traveling the trails westward in 1849 was a young man named David Dewolf. Dewolf penned one of the more complimentary descriptions of Fort Bridger, writing on August 11 of that year:

Fort Bridger is beautifully situated in the finest valley we have seen in the mountains the fort is built of hewn logs & covered about ½ acre some of the logs around a part of it are set on their ends & are about 10 feet high, the rest of it the logs are layed lengthwise, the fort proprietors, Bridger and Vacues, they have snake squaws for wives one of the houses is occupied as a trading house in which they have quite a store. Here I saw cows calves hogs cats dogs chickens etc in fact it looked more like living than any thing I have seen for some time.

Barring Dewolf's sense of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation – or lack thereof – this is an interesting description of early Fort Bridger. The mention of 'hewn logs' indicates that the buildings were constructed of squared logs. Archaeology has confirmed this observation.

'Vacues' (Pierre Louis Vasquez) is said to have had a 'snake' (Shoshone) wife, but in fact she was of Euro-American background.

* *An Artist on the Overland Trail - The 1849 Diary and Sketches of James F. Wilkins*, edited by John Francis McDermott, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California 1968, p. 57.

* *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, p. 204.

Aunt Agony's Advice

Advice for men and women in the Victorian era (1837-1901) taken from
The Essential Handbook of Victorian Etiquette.



Dear Aunt Agony,

I received a love correspondence from a gentleman that would like an interview with me. I met him briefly last Thursday evening at the residence of my father's business partner. My recollections of said gentleman are not fond. I am of marriageable age and do not want to become a spinster. I would greatly appreciate any advice on how to respond.

Sincerely yours,
Miss Betty

My Dearest Miss Betty,

From my friend Professor Hill, "Let no lady commence and continue a correspondence with a view to marriage, for fear that she may never have another opportunity." Your true mate is out there and he will find you.

The disgrace attached to the term "spinster" has long since passed. It's better to have a single, free, and independent maidenhood than for a woman to marry and bring poverty, shame, and disgrace on her children by marrying unfavorably.

As for your reply, remember you are a lady and as such, your reply, though unfavorable, should be polite. A sample for which your response could be: Making it a rule to receive no gentleman visitors upon such a brief acquaintance, begs to decline the honor of _____.

Well wishes in this and for your future acquaintances.

Sincerely,
Aunt Agony

ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT

BY: MARTIN LAMMERS

Recent Archaeology at the Fort Bridger State Historic Site

Since last reported several archaeological projects have begun at Fort Bridger, or continued as ongoing research under the direction of Dr. Dudley Gardner. To save time and space only those projects from 2020 will be considered.

It should be noted that due to the manifestation of the current virus situation expanded excavations previously planned had to be severely curtailed or even canceled. Overall, the excavations have not been as extensive this year as initially planned, but are only ‘put-off’ for the time being.



Metal bar found in the Lunette

Excavations have continued on one of two 1857-58 military structures known as “lunettes”. The lunette currently being excavated is situated to the northwest of the present museum. Previous excavations exposed portions of a trench, or moat, but the current focus of excavation centers on identifying and exposing a portion of the lunette floor; and to also locate where two trench portions join to form a point. With the help of

WWCC Anthropology intern Shinnin Miles a step has been taken to answer those two questions. A concentration of limestone blocks recently uncovered may indicate the lunette’s northernmost ‘barbette’, or artillery emplacement.

A project undertaken near the present museum was meant to expose and excavate a portion of the “Mormon Wall”. This section of Mormon Wall represents a major portion of previously unexcavated western wall of the corral area. Since this area is believed to be the location of the Bridger-Vasquez and Latter-Day Saint Trading Post corral, the potential for finding very early structural and cultural remains was central to all considerations.



Uncovered “Mormon Wall” section

In reality, what’s been learned is that contrary to being ‘just a corral’, the area between the present museum and the Old Commissary has seen much use over the previous one hundred-fifty plus years. The Mormon Wall has certainly been identified and exposed, but along with that has been found a portion of limestone wall or foundation believed to be a portion of the 1868 Quartermasters Storehouse. At least one utility line interruption was located which shows definite modern disturbance within the last 60 to 70 years or more. Excavation was done with the assistance of WWCC Anthropology intern Shinnin Miles.

Recent Archaeology at the Fort Bridger State Historic Site Cont.

Perhaps the one excavation involving the most work – and yielding the greatest results – was the excavation of a deep, limestone block-lined structure believed to be a well nearby to where the William and Mary Carter residence was originally situated. An overview of the well shows that it is made of limestone blocks laid in a circular pattern with the layers, or courses of blocks extending downward to a depth of roughly seven feet below the ground surface. The interior was a jumble of dirt, bricks (several with ‘St. Louis’ makers marks), broken limestone blocks, cobble stones, and artifacts. A pair of leather boots were found and will be sent away for conservation. A metal dinner plate was recovered along with a decorative lady’s hair pin. Most artifacts were noted as being broken glass, metal, and bone fragments. Several pieces of tongue-and-groove flooring were recovered and it’s been thought that these might have formed a floor or barrel-like lining at the well bottom. Excavation was done by visiting archaeologist Emma-Leigh Evors and Dr. Dudley Gardner. Groundwater was met at about 5 feet and pumping was an almost constant occurrence. Overall, the well was excavated to a depth of just over 8 feet.

Helping with the excavation were Dr. Dudley Gardner, Site staff Dee Foote and Joshua Camp, WWCC Anthropology intern Shinnin Miles, and visiting archaeologist Emma-Leigh Evors.



Dr. Dudley Gardner near the bottom of the well



Emma-Leigh Evors with metal Plate

Event Highlight

By: Anjoli Mosier

Girl Scouts Love State Parks

Every year, Girl Scouts explore the wide variety of state parks found throughout the nation during their annual Girl Scouts Love State Parks weekend. On September 12 and 13, Fort Bridger State Historic Site was host to 9 young campers and 5 adult parents and leaders for an overnight historic campout adventure.

The staff came out in full costume and taught the girls about starting a fire using flint and glass, how to set up historic canvas tents in three styles that were once used among the military troops of the past, together the site staff and scouts cooked a meal that would have been eaten on trail in dutch ovens with butter shaken by hand with the food cooked over the fire they started. Games that may have once been played by children living at the post were taught to the scouts helping them see the past in the present.

The girls, in turn, taught the staff at Fort Bridger their favorite camp songs and dances, much to the delight (it is to be assumed) and maybe somewhat of the dismay of the staff. Camp songs might be secret camp songs for a reason.

Various stations were held for the girls to also learn about some of the history of the fort including the 5 M's of Fort Bridger, how life would have been during the time of the mountain men and how the blacksmith shop would have run.



A flag ceremony was held and then it was onto Smore's, hot chocolate, campfire and stargazing for the girls.

The next morning the girls helped put up the flag and then got to tour the buildings on site with the help of one of the site staff (who also happens to be a Girl Scout Mom and frequent camp attendee). That someone they knew had keys and could show them inside some of the buildings seemed to be an extra exciting treat, especially to the youngest girls at the event.

"I thought it was amazing," Girl Scout Regional Director Melissa Webb said of the event. "And very much appreciated. The way the staff was so supportive and worked with the girls was terrific."



Meet Kyle Bernis

Wyoming State Parks and Fort Bridger State Historic Site welcomes Kyle Bernis as the new Shoshone district manager overseeing Bear River, Fort Bridger, South Pass City, Sinks Canyon, and Seminoe.

Kyle is a native of south Louisiana and has many years of experience in parks in various capacities.

He began his career as a seasonal at Longfellow-Evangeline State Historic site in his home state. From there, he obtained a full-time position as a law enforcement ranger at Lake Fausse Pointe State Park and as a Park Ranger Specialist (training ranger) at Chicot State Park. While there, he obtained this bachelor of science degree from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

He then got into management as the assistant manager at Poverty Point Reservoir State Park, then as manager at Bogue Chitto State Park. Kyle was also Chief Ranger with Louisiana Parks during his last three years with the agency.

Kyle then moved to Oklahoma in 2015 to assist in managing the family business, a nationwide trucking company based in OKC. After three years, he returned to parks as the manager of Roman Nose State Park, where he worked until recently.

Kyle and his wife are both glad to be in Wyoming now and look forward to promoting the mission of Wyoming State Parks. We are happy to have Kyle onboard to contribute his knowledge and experience to this agency.



Calendar: October-December

- **October 1– Winter Season Begins**

Grounds open daily 9-dusk, (Admission is still required to walk the grounds)

Museum open Fri-Sun 9-5

Admissions: \$2 per resident, \$4 per non-resident, 17 and under free.

- **October 24– Halloween Trick or Treat**

6:30-9 pm– \$5 per person, age 5 and under free

Walk a scary solar lighted path throughout the site and receive candy at the historic buildings along the way. For your safety and scaring pleasure, we will only send you to walk through with your immediate household. Please dress warmly and we recommend bringing a flashlight or glow stick.

- **December 13– Christmas at the Fort**

1-4 pm– \$5 per person or bring an item per attendee for the Bridger Valley Food Pantry, age 12 and under free.

Walk through the decorated Commanding Officer's Quarters and Log Officer's Quarters as you look for paper Santas to win a candy cane, snowshoe an obstacle course around the parade grounds, and warm up at the museum with hot chocolate and coffee. The event will end with an all ages snowshoe race and a prize for the winner.

Snowshoes will be available but we recommend you bring your own if you have them.

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**Improving Communities
and
Enriching Lives**



Fort Bridger's mission is to protect, preserve, and promote Fort Bridger State Historic Site while providing educational and interpretive opportunities for the citizens of Wyoming and visitors from around the nation and the world.



Become a Member

Become a Fort Bridger Historical Association or
Fort Bridger Rendezvous Association member today!



Fort Bridger Historical Association Mission:

The Fort Bridger Historical Association is a non-profit organization whose function is to promote, support, and preserve the Fort Bridger State Historic Site.

Yearly membership is \$50 and includes a membership in the Wyoming State Historical Society.

For more information or to join call 307-782-3842 or e-mail FBHA1843@gmail.com

Fort Bridger Rendezvous Association Mission:

The Fort Bridger Rendezvous Association is a non-profit organization to promote, educate, and re-live the history, culture and life ways of the Fur Trade Era of the American West 1790-1840.

Yearly membership is \$20.

For more information or to join visit fortbridgerrendezvous.net, call 801-635-4038, or e-mail FBRAINCA@hotmail.com